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ABSTRACT

Efforts to identify the relative potencies of the domains which determine adolescent life satisfaction suggest a condition that differentially potentiates a domain's ability to account for life satisfaction, i.e., father absence. High School students (N=778) completed the Life Satisfaction Chart and indicated their satisfaction with family, friends, and school. An additional questionnaire explored educational aspiration, problem-solving behaviors, and individual accomplishments. Girls from father-absent families (N=63), in contrast to those from father-present families (N=345), showed a drop in potency of the family and an increase in potency of self-efficacy, friends, and age. Boys from father-absent families (N=72), in contrast to father-present families (N=298), showed a drop in potency of family and friends and a sharp increase in potency of self-efficacy. (Author/NRB)

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ADOLESCENT LIFE SATISFACTION DOMAINS: INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND FATHER ABSENCE[1]

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ABSTRACT

Potencies of theoretically relevant domains of adolescence to account for life satisfaction of high school students were examined as a function of father-absence and gender. Multiple-regression analyses were used to ascertain the following domain potencies: family, friends, school, educational aspiration, self-efficacy, and age. Girls from father-absent (N=63), in contrast to those from father-present families (N=345), show a drop in potency of the family and an increase in potency of self-efficacy, friends, and age. Boys from father-absent (N=72), in contrast to father-present families (N=298), show a drop in potency of family and friends and a sharp increase in potency of self-efficacy. The implications of the interactions of ecological factors such as family structure and gender to differentially potentiate life satisfaction domains are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

While evaluation of adolescent life satisfaction (LS) is of theoretical and applied concern in itself, it is also important to identify and evaluate the relative potencies of the domains which determine adolescent LS. Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976), Andrews and Withey (1976), and Atkinson and Murray (Note 1) point to intimate social relationships (marriage, family, love) and, secondarily, economic conditions as the most powerful domains for American adults. Atkinson and Murray (Note 1) report that while love and marriage is the most potent domain, it is "of much greater importance to females than to males and to married than to unmarried persons" and is especially potent for married females. Work, on the other hand, is a more important domain for men than for women.

For high-school aged adolescents, intimate social relationships typically involve: (a) parents and, (b) friends. Since adolescence, as a developmental stage, supposedly involves shifts in emotional attachment from parents to peers, it would be of value to determine differences in the relative potencies of these domains. From an ecological view, it is important to determine the life conditions which affect the potencies of these as well as other domains.

A previous study (Torgoff, Torgoff, & Ponder, Note 2) examined the differential saliency of several domains of the adolescent experience. The results of multiple regression analyses done separately for gender by race (black and white) subgroups revealed differences in the potencies of particular domains to account for LS variance among the four subgroups. "Accomplishments," for instance, was a more potent domain for males than for females, regardless of race; "family" was the most important domain

of white males and females and black females, but was only a minor domain for black males. Such results pointed to the need to identify the conditions in the life space of adolescents that differentially potentiate a domain's ability to account for LS.

The present investigation examines one of these conditions, one of major theoretical and applied significance--father absence/presence. Does father absence/presence have a direct impact on LS, or does it operate indirectly by differentially potentiating other domains? Would the family domain increase in potency under father-absent condition, or would friends emerge as a more salient domain? What impact would father-absence have on other domains, such as self-efficacy, school, educational aspiration? Would the effects be similar for males and females?

METHOD

A stratified, cluster sampling of classes (grades 9-12; ages 14-18) in the senior high schools of a mid-Western city yielded a sample of 345 father-present females, 63 father-absent females, 298 father-present males, and 72 father-absent males.

Students indicated their level of overall LS on the Life Satisfaction Chart (LSC), group administered during class sessions. The LSC, similar to Cantril's (1965) self-anchoring Ladder of Aspiration, consists of a "ladder" marked in graduated units from zero ("Life at its very worst, as you see it") to 100 ("Life at its very best, as you see it?).

In addition, students similarly indicated their satisfaction with: (1) family; (2) friends; (3) school. An accompanying questionnaire elicited responses to questions regarding (4) educational aspiration ("How far do you plan to go in school?"), and two items from the Efficacy Index (Andrews & Withey, 1974): (5) handling problems ("How do you feel about

the way you handle the problems that come up in your life?"); and (6) accomplishments ("How do you feel about what you are accomplishing in life?").

RESULTS

An analysis of variance of LS as a function of gender and father absence/presence yielded a significant effect for gender ($\overline{LS}$ females = 74.6; $\overline{LS}$ males = 78.6), but not for father absence/presence ($\overline{LS}$ father-present = 76.5; $\overline{LS}$ father-absent = 76.4), or for the interaction of the two factors. While father presence/absence did not directly impinge on LS, a series of multiple regressions reveal that this ecological condition plays a powerful role in differentially potentiating domains that do impact on LS.

Separate multiple-regression analyses of LS yielded beta weights for each domain and the percentage of variance lost when the domain is removed from the equation for each of the four sub-groups of adolescents.

The potency of the total set of domains to predict LS is similar for each sub-group. R^2 ranges from .43 to .48. The potency of a particular domain differs, however, from sub-group to sub-group.

Females: For father-present females, "family" is the most potent domain. The unique variance which this domain contributes (11.6%) is three times that contributed by "friends" (3.9%) and almost ten times that of the two remaining significant domains, "accomplishments" (1.2%) and age (1.0%). For father-absent females, however, the potency of "family" diminishes considerably, in fact, it doesn't contribute significantly to LS variance--the significant domains are age (8.0%),"friends" (7.1%) and "accomplishments" (6.0%).

Males: For father-present males, as for father-present females, "family," "friends," and "accomplishments" account for significant portions of LS variance. "Family" (4.9%) is not, however, the predominant contributor to LS variance of father-present males as it is for father-present females (11.6%). For father-present males, "friends" (5.2%) and "accomplishments" (3.5%) account for more LS variance than for father-present females (3.9% and 1.2%, respectively). For father-absent males, the pattern of domain potencies is strikingly different --"accomplishments" is, by far, the most potent domain (20.6%). The only other domain accounting for a significant portion of LS variance is "educational aspiration" (4.9%) and it is negative in direction (the higher the level of educational aspiration, the lower the LS). For father-absent males, as for father-absent females, "family" does not account for a significant portion of LS variance. Unlike father-absent females, for whom "friends" constitutes a significant potent domain (7.1%), "friends" does not account for significant LS variance of father-absent males.

Limitations and implications of the study for an ecological perspective of adolescent personality development will be discussed.

Reference Notes

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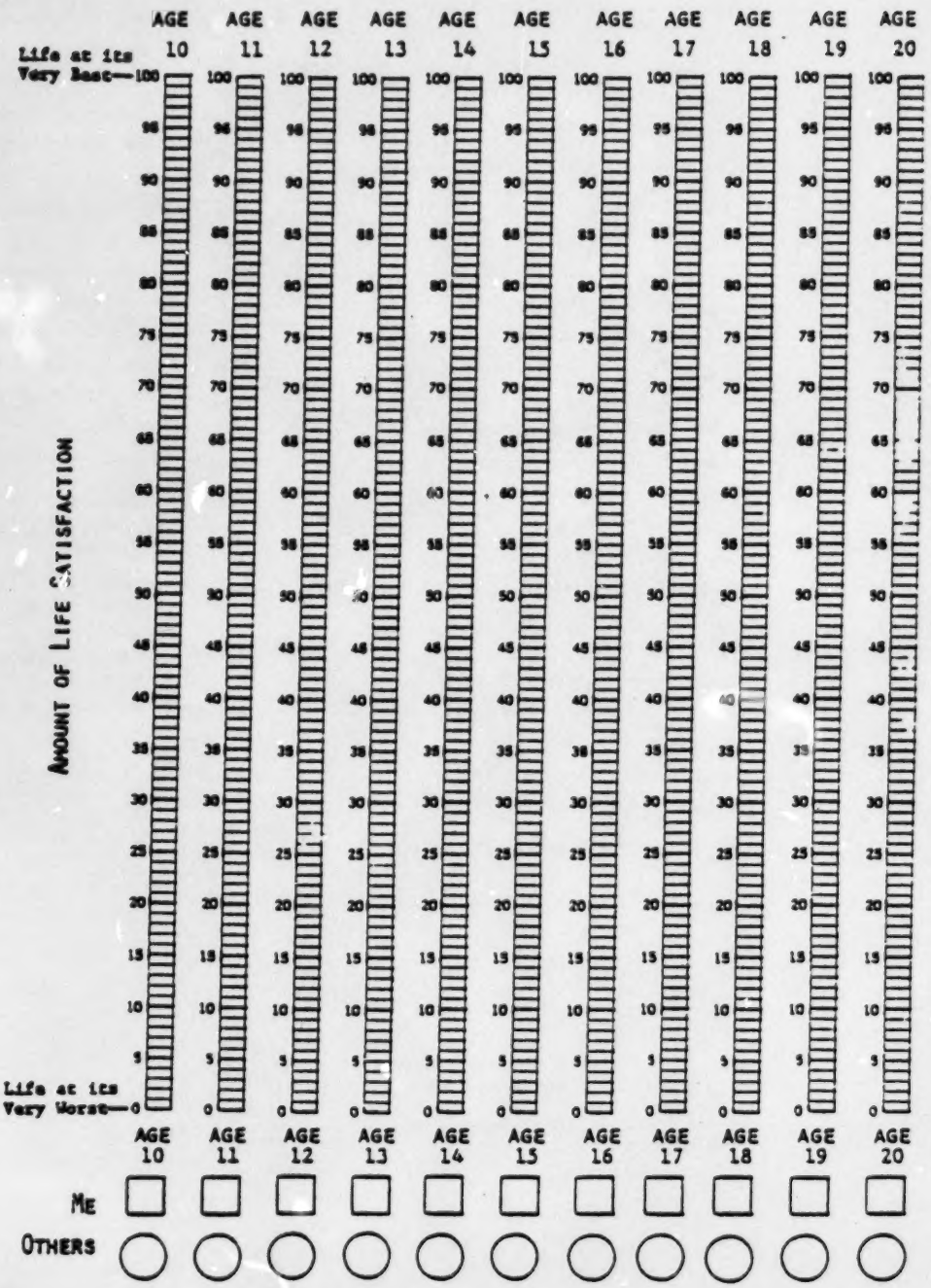
Your age: _____

Life Satisfaction Chart



How satisfied are you with:

1) your home & family life ☐

2) your friends & social life ☐

3) your life as a student ☐

4) your work life ☐

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Here are some questions which will help us better understand how high school students view their lives. Check (✓) the one answer that tells best what YOU think.

1. Taken altogether, how would you say things are these days? Would say they were

   _____ 1. not too happy
   _____ 2. pretty happy
   _____ 3. very happy

2. How has your health been over the last year or so? Would you say you've been in

   _____ 1. very bad health
   _____ 2. bad health
   _____ 3. O.K. health
   _____ 4. good health
   _____ 5. very good health

3. With regard to your physical development, would say your development is

   _____ 1. very early
   _____ 2. somewhat early
   _____ 3. average
   _____ 4. somewhat late
   _____ 5. very late

4. How attractive are you compared with others of your age?

   _____ 1. much less attractive
   _____ 2. somewhat less attractive
   _____ 3. about the same
   _____ 4. somewhat more attractive
   _____ 5. much more attractive

5. How well are you getting along with your mother?

   _____ 1. terrible
   _____ 2. not well
   _____ 3. O. K.
   _____ 4. well
   _____ 5. very well
   _____ 0. can't say--mother not alive or not living with me

6. How well are you getting along with your father?

   _____ 1. terrible
   _____ 2. not well
   _____ 3. O. K.
   _____ 4. well
   _____ 5. very well
   _____ 0. can't say--father not alive or not living with me

7. What is the highest grade in school that your mother finished?

   _____ 1. less than 8th grade
   _____ 2. finished 8th grade
   _____ 3. some high school
   _____ 4. high school graduate
   _____ 5. some college
   _____ 6. college graduate

8. What is the highest grade in school that your father finished?

   _____ 1. less than 8th grade
   _____ 2. finished 8th grade
   _____ 3. some high school
   _____ 4. high school graduate
   _____ 5. some college
   _____ 6. college graduate

9. How far do you plan to go in school?

   _____ 1. less than high school graduation
   _____ 2. graduate from high school and not go on
   _____ 3. graduate, go on to a vocational, technical or business school
   _____ 4. go to a junior college
   _____ 5. go to a 4-year college
   _____ 6. go to a graduate or professional school after college

10. How do you feel about the way you handle the problems that come up in your life?

    _____ 1. terrible
    _____ 2. not good
    _____ 3. O. K.
    _____ 4. good
    _____ 5. very good

11. How do you feel about what you are accomplishing in your life?

    _____ 1. terrible
    _____ 2. not good
    _____ 3. O. K.
    _____ 4. good
    _____ 5. very good

12. When you have a personal problem that is really troubling you, what would you most likely do?

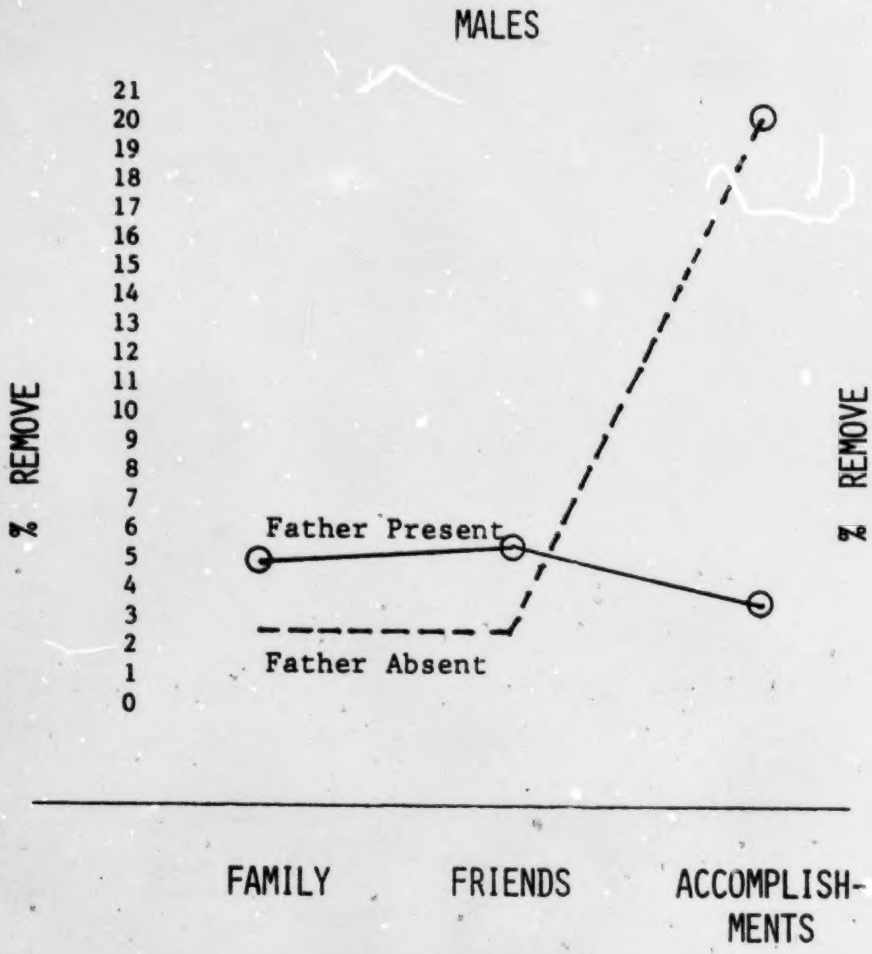
    _____ 1. There is no one I can talk to.
    _____ 2. I usually prefer to work things out myself.
    _____ 3. I have a friend or relative I can talk things over with.

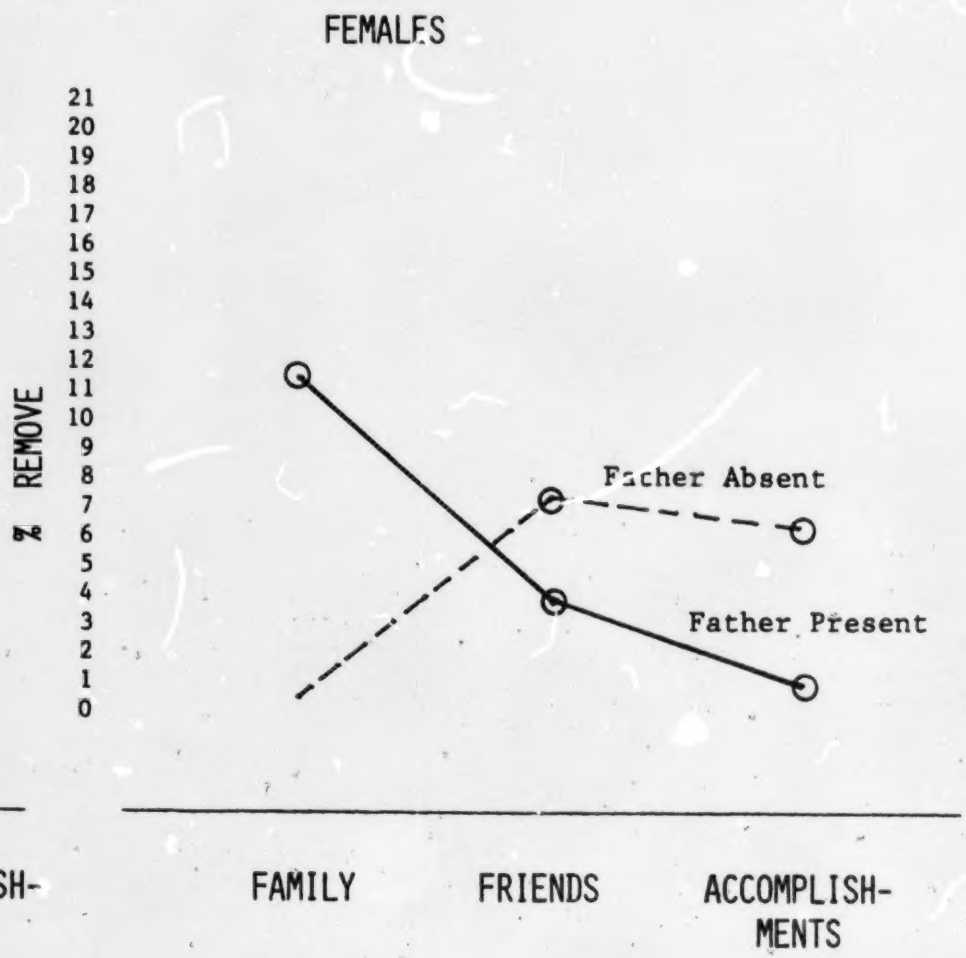
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOMAINS AND LIFE SATISFACTION AS A FUNCTION OF SEX AND FATHER PRESENCE/ABSENCE

SUBGROUP	N	R^2	LIFE SATISFACTION $\bar{X}$	LIFE SATISFACTION S.D.	DOMAINS: FAMILY $\bar{X}$	FAMILY S.D.	FAMILY BETA	FAMILY REMOVE*	FRIENDS $\bar{X}$	FRIENDS S.D.	FRIENDS BETA	FRIENDS REMOVE*	ACCOMPLISHMENTS $\bar{X}$	ACCOMPLISHMENTS S.D.	ACCOMPLISHMENTS BETA	ACCOMPLISHMENTS REMOVE*
TOTAL SAMPLE	781	.44	76.6	20.0	78.1	24.9	.32	7.4%	81.1	19.3	.25	4.8%	3.6	1.0	.22	3.4%
MALES																
Father Present	298	.43	78.4	19.6	81.3	22.0	.27	4.9%	83.6	17.8	.27	5.2%	3.6	1.0	.22	3.5%
Father Absent	72	.47	79.2	19.4	80.8	25.1	.19	2.3%	80.6	19.7	.16	2.3%	3.8	1.0	.59	20.6%
FEMALES																
Father Present	345	.47	75.1	20.2	74.8	26.8	.41	11.6%	79.1	20.4	.22	3.9%	3.6	1.0	.13	1.2%
Father Absent	63	.48	72.7	20.9	76.9	25.5	.12	.9%	79.7	18.9	.33	7.1%	3.3	1.1	.30	6.0%

*"REMOVE" indicates the percentage of variance lost when the variable is removed from the regression equation. Atkinson & Murray (Note 1) note that "this procedure is recommended when the independent variables are correlated with each other as they are here. It provides a conservative estimate of the unique effects of each domain."

INFLUENCE OF FATHER PRESENCE/ABSENCE ON DOMAIN VARIABLES





○ beta significant at<.05